Informant:	**LMP-S8**	**Spanish**
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Interviewer:	**Claudia Hernandez**	
Transcriber:	**Rebeca Hernandez**	

CH: Which botanicas existed already when you arrived here?

S8: I think the oldest botanica around here is this one. But the one that follows it is the one that's on Alvarado and 8th street. But we basically practice the same thing. This botanica has been here for ten years.

CH: But not in this same place right?

S8: Right. It was right next to this establishment. The only thing we did was to divide it in half.

CH: Do you know how long the other botanicas have been around?

S8: The other ones have been here for around three or four years.

CH: Have you seen any botanicas that have run out of business?

S8: Yes. Some of them open up, are around for two months or a year, and then disappear because the owner didn't have the experience necessary for the needs of the community. You need to have knowledge of all the different fields such as spiritual works and the use of herbs, teas and other natural resources. It is something that the owner of a botanica should have.

CH: Has the same kind of people always lived around here? Or has it changed? Has it always been predominantly Hispanic?

S8: I have noticed that lately white and African-American people have started going to botanicas. With them things are a bit different because I sometimes don't trust them that much because they have other believes. So when it comes to selling them herbs, I often think of the fact that they weren't born with these beliefs and that somebody just recommended my botanica to them. So there has been a wider variety of people coming.

CH: But have you also seen that change in this community? Or do you still see only Latinos living here?

S8: The amount of non-Latino people has increased. But this doesn't necessarily mean that I have more customers. Because the more people the more establishments there are. A lot of people that move to this community don't believe in anything. This is about having faith.

CH: Do you remember the year you established this business?

S8: It's only been a year since I opened this part of the business, but it's been 10 years since I opened up this business. It's been ten years of people seeing my face around and knowing what I do.

CH: Was the botanica where I met you owned by your family?

S8: After you saw me I had to leave the country, so I had to sell it. So now it's owned by someone else. But the good thing is people that really know about botanicas know how to keep their business running.

CH: Are you the owner of this business?

S8: Yes.

CH: Is this botanica related to any other one?

S8: Not directly, but it is related to other botanicas that my family members own.

CH: Can you give me an example?

S8: In this same street we have three other botanicas. We have the one that's next door, the one that's one block down, and the one up here.

CH: But you are not associates between you?

S8: No.

CH: Does this botanica have a religious orientation?

S8: No. We only try to have people take everything with faith. Faith is part of every religion. There is no good or bad religion.

CH: Are there are religious traditions used here? For example there are botanicas that are owned by spiritists that don't believe in Catholicism.

S8: They all intermingle with each other. Spiritists often use saints from the Catholic religion. They use them for health problems, protection, and for good luck. So you can't really criticize one belief or the other. They all depend on each other. The only thing is that everyone sets their own limits in regards to what they should believe in. But in here we don't have one. In here we only believe in sainthood.

CH: What do you think are the percentage of Latinos and of the rest of each one of the (ethnic) groups that come here?

S8: 80 per cent Latino, and the rest white or African-American. I don't like offering them anything because as I said, they don't take it as they should. If they don't take something with faith it won't do them any good or any bad. So they will usually feel like a failure. So I prefer helping out my own people.

CH: How do you advertise your business?

S8: There are many botanicas that advertise themselves through internet or on t.v. But I think that whoever knows what he is doing and does it with honesty; people will simply look for you. I don't really have any publicity. Wherever I go people look for me. People know me and that is even better than coming out on t.v. commercials. I can't make publicity with money that I don't have. This business is about making money but also about helping out people.

CH: What is the difference between candelas and ?(velas)?

S8: They are both the same. Sometimes we have different names. For example, this is a ?(cirio). These are the candelas. Everything has a meaning and all of them have a different story to them. This one is for peace and protection. This other one is a "variety: candle. You ask for anything you want. What's really important is faith in everything you do. Even if you just spend a dollar and use it with faith, it will help you. It doesn't matter what kind of ?(veladora) or candela you use.

CH: Would you say that each color and each saint has it's meaning?

S8: Yes. There are some for love, some for work and so on. A lot of people are looking for a good job in order to have money. For this you use the green candle. Every thing you want to ask for has it's own specific color.

CH: Are there saint that are in higher demand than others?

(phone rang, never answered the question)

CH: Do you sell bracelets or necklaces?

S8: No because this area is not appropriate for this. But the business that I owned on 6th and Alvarado was just the right place for this. Each community has its own specific demands. People in here buy a lot of tea and natural products. People around here like massages.

CH: Do you know how to give massages?

S8: Yes. But nothing too serious; just pulled or strained muscles. Nothing outside of that.

CH: Is that what you know how to do best?

S8: If we go back to our history, massages have always existed, but it's really important to know how to do them the right way. It is a very old practice. Our ancestors didn't know anything about x-rays. If they had a broken bone they would try to fix it. Even if we have new forms of technology, the old fashioned way still works.

CH: We were just talking about the fact that you don't really buy necklaces because they don't sell too well around here. What about the incense amulets? Do you sell them here?

S8: Yes. A lot of people buy them to protect their homes and to protect themselves. That is good because this is what amulets are for. They are good for cleaning homes and for getting rid of bad vibes. They are even good for giving a healthier mood to a place.

CH: Do you make the amulets or do you make them?

S8: I have to make some of them and the rest of them I just buy. But I have to make the majority of them. I can give you an example of the most commercial amulet for work. You use gold powder for prosperity and silver powder for health. We also use ?(piedra himan) and ?(piedra lumbre). ?(Piedra himan) is to attract magnetic energy, and ?(piedra lumbre) is to keep out the people that envy you. You blend all these ingredients and light the ?(veladora). This amulet will help you find a job, will help you become more prosperous, and will give you protection. It doesn't bring abundance because if it would bring it everyone would have one. But it does help bring the necessary things for life. That is more than enough.

CH: Do you make them in little bags?

S8: Yes. They can also be done on coins or on paper money. They are very tiny bags.

CH: When you prepare the amulets do you prepare a candle at the same time?

S8: Yes. You have to light a candle for the petition of the saint and the protection that was asked for. This goes back to what you were commenting a second ago about Catholicism. There are Catholic saints that are used here. So some people will come and for example ask me if I can prepare them a candle for Jesus Christ.

CH: I would like to ask you something about you. Are you a spiritual specialist or do you have a religious belief?

S8: At this moment I am not really dedicating my life to any of those specific fields. I work with many of those fields. I am a masseuse, I am a curandero, and I know about prophecies. But I am not really focused on one or the other.

CH: Did you have a calling from God to be a curandero or was this passed down to you?

S8: It was passed down. My mother and my grandparents were curanderos. So it is a combination of the fact that it is hereditary and that I enjoy doing what I do. I know this because out of seven sibling most of them took a different path. I followed this path and I have learned how to do it right because I have faith in myself and because people have had faith in me.

CH: Were your grandparents and mother spiritual people?

S8: Back home in their own village they were actual curanderos.

CH: Where were they from?

S8: My mother was from the outskirts of Toluca and my grandparents were from Oaxaca. The blend of these two cultures caused me to have a very enriched knowledge of this. But I have also gained experienced from traveling to other states. I have learned a lot about healing and sha-mans. This is how I have "written my own book". I have traveled to many states in order to be able to put in practice my new ideas.

CH: SO this is something you've been practicing since a very young age?

S8: Yes. Ever since I was a kid I have been trying to learn about this. But I have had other jobs that have allowed me to take a break from this. But I always come back to this business because I like it. In regards to being a masseuse. Is this also something you inherited from your family. Yes. I used to see my mother doing it so I learned from watching. SO it was a combination of having that experience and later on learning some theories about it. Even though I am aware of the fact that I don't have an x-ray machine on my eyes, I am aware of the moments when I know a muscle or a bone can be fixed with a massage. Definitely broken bones cannot be fixed.

CH: Are you also able to read the prophecies because you inherited this?

S8: Slowly one starts acquiring this type of knowledge in the circle of people that I am in. I slowly started realizing I was able to know what was going to happen in the future. I guide myself through the deck of cards. I astrologically know what could happen with the cards. But for example, you don't have to be a prophet to know that the situation in our society is not doing well. I can't really guess when something big in a city will happen. But sometimes I can feel that something bad will occur. I get this odd feeling and I spend more time making sure my family is protected.

CH: What do you remember from your childhood that influenced the interest and knowledge you have now about this?

S8: There wasn't really one particular experience. I have not really done anything outside the normal. The only thing I've done is help people heal. But what really motivated me to continue as a practitioner was the faith people have in me. I have gained good money from this, so it's really good to have a reward for what you do to your people. It gives me an incentive to know that besides the fact that I know how to do this we, I am getting paid for it. This is how I discovered this was my path. I have never done anything wonderful such as saving someone from death. But I do know that I have helped people and that I have put all my love and effort to it.

CH: How old were you when you started healing people?

S8: After I was fifteen was when I started developing my knowledge and that's when I started to cure people.

CH: Were your relatives teaching you how to cure people or did you just start learning it on your own from watching?

S8: I learned on my own because there was no one willing to teach me. So if you have the vocation, you are watching how it's being done, and you like doing it, you don't need someone to teach you.

CH: Is Toluca in Mexico?

S8: Yes. It's right next to Mexico city.

CH: When you started gaining knowledge about healing, did you ever go through an initiation ritual?

S8: No. It's only about having it in your blood and practicing what you know.

CH: Out of your seven siblings were you the only one that is dedicated to working in botanicas?

S8: No. It's three of us. Out of the three I can say that I am the one that earns the least money on this business. Why? Because I only own one business, and I really put heart to it in order to help people. I am not really focused on how much money I will make. In the other hand, my brothers have had great profits from this. It all depends on how each individual works.

CH: Do you have any other relatives besides your siblings that own a botanica?

S8: Yes. But everyone is spread all over the place. They are in different parts of Mexico. There has been other relatives that had had the faith and devotion needed for this job. Only my two siblings and me are the only ones that own a business. Every one else has taken their job very lightly. Healing is a tradition in my family.

CH: Did you start healing when you were back in your own hometown?

S8: Yes, ever since I started to come into my senses. My mother's money came from these works, so that's where I started learning about healing.

CH: What does your father think of your mother's job?

S8: My father wasn't against what my mom was doing but he never got into it either. He has a different job. He was never an obstacle for my mother's practices.

CH: What does your mom think of the fact that you guys are practitioners like her?

S8: She likes the fact that we have done well with this business. She tries to give us advice and we still learn a lot from her. She is a very wise woman and I think it is really important to listen to what elder people like her have to say. She is very supportive.

CH: Do you work with any particular saint or spirit?

S8: No.

CH: Do you have a specific religion that you have faith in? Do you have more indigenous prayers or more Catholic prayers?

S8: My prayers are more indigenous, more mystic. They are not written down in paper. They are prayers that are passed down and that allow me to say the right words and have the right petitions at the right time.

CH: So does that mean you don't say the same exact prayer every time you pray for a specific reason?

S8: No. It's not like saying an Our Father every day. It all depends on what you are doing.

CH: Can you foresee what your client's spiritual, emotional, or physical problems are?

S8: Foreseeing means to make up or to try knowing something. I don't really see anything, I feel it. A person can transmit that to me. That is more intense.

CH: How do you call that power?

S8: They call it the power of healing. Put I call it the power to be able to help and to share what we know. This is the reason why I am not wealthy. I focus more on other things.

CH: Can you give me an example of what you do in order to know what's wrong with a person? Is it something you automatically feel when you see the person or do you have to read the deck of cards?

S8: When there is person that has not been able to find out what's wrong with them, you can't tell. You can feel it. It is a combination of a negative and a positive force that is transmitted. One always knows a little more that the client thinks, but we have to be careful. Of what we will tell the client.

CH: Do you read palms or the tarot?

S8: I do both.

CH: What kind of cards do you read?

S8: Whenever a person knows how to read cards, he can read any kind; from ?(Naipes) and ?(copiano) up to the most specialized cars.

CH: Can you give me some other day a session on how to read cards?

S8: Sure.

CH: Do you recommend specific rituals or religious objects to your customers?

S8: No because that would mean you would be devoted to a specific saint. And as I said before, this is about having faith to God and faith to do what you want to.

CH: How long have you lived in Los Angeles?

S8: Probably about eight years.

CH: Do you often go back to Mexico?

S8: Yes. I go and stay there one or two months.

CH: Have you lived in any other state in the U.S.?

S8: No, but I have visited other states. I have only state anywhere else for days or months. I prefer Los Angeles.

CH: Where were you born?

S8: I was born in Mexico city but I was raised in various cities. I lived in Vera cruz, Oaxaca, and Chiapas. But I actually went to school in Mexico city. I have sought knowledge about healing in various places.

CH: Were you a healer and a curandero in your hometown?

S8: Ever since I was fifteen I started working as a healer.

CH: Have you ever worked in temples?

S8: No. I have never liked working for anyone. I don't like adoring saints through the healing that I do.

CH: Did you have an established business as a healer when you were at home?

S8: It was outside my house but it wasn't really an establishment. I opened up my own business for the first time here in L.A.

CH: Have you worked in a Botanica the whole eight years that you've been here?

S8: Yes. I've always worked in a Botanica.

CH: Since you have worked here and out of the country as a curandero, do you see a difference between the way this is practiced at home and here?

S8: Yes it's really different because people here have a wide variety of cultural backgrounds such as Mexican, Central American, and South American. It is a humongous blend. But it is a good compilation of information because we can all share our knowledge with each other. There is a high demand for this kind of help here but you have to learn how to adjust to the person's traditions. So by doing this you learn and you acquire new knowledge.

CH: I can see that for example in the name of your botanica- botanica Centro America. Is that one of the ways you are trying to adjust to what your communities demands are?

S8: Exactly. It is a way of saying that I am capable of helping out not only the Mexican community, but also the Central and South American one. And I have succeeded because this name has given me publicity, strength, and security.

CH: When were you born?

S8: I was born on October 22, 1970.

CH: How many children do you have?

S8: Three.

CH: Do you think it would be a good idea for your children to continue the tradition that you have received from you parents?

S8: If they learn it and they like it that is fine. But I won't enforce anything on them. They have to look for their vocation. And as a parent I want my children to be well read and to be able to defend themselves. But if one of them feels attracted to this knowledge, he will learn it on his own.